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# INDEPENDENT SPIRIT

Vol. V, No. 1

Winter 1984



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# INDEPENDENT SPIRIT

Vol. V, No. 1

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## The Algiers Incidents: A Violently Political Document

Linda Dubler

*The Algiers Incidents.* Janet Densmore. 1982. ¾" Videotape. Color. Sound. 30m.

Looking over a copy of the application form for the San Francisco Video Festival, I noticed that the festival's directors had taken great pains to qualify several newly instituted entry categories. Under documentary they had written: "Long a troublesome term, documentary refers to a chronicle or listing of fact. Producers aware of the subjective nature of the recording process have questioned the validity of this designation. Others have presented their work as 'fact' of sorts, but in an action/entertainment format borrowed from narrative film." This mini-discourse reminded me of a recent discussion at the Chinsegut Film Conference which touched on the "troublesome" qualities of documentary, and also of a tape called *The Algiers Incidents*, a violently political document that has been more troublesome and more troubling than anything else I have seen in a long time.

The work of a New Orleans video artist named Janet Densmore, *The Algiers Incidents* deals with the issue of police brutality as related to a series of events which took place in the black New Orleans neighborhood of Algiers, in November, 1980. They began on November 8th, with the mysterious fatal shooting of a New Orleans police officer, Gregory Neupert, a killing which triggered a massive police action in the black community. Scores of suspects were taken to police headquarters, where they were beaten and some tortured in an effort to identify Neupert's killer(s). On November 13th, five days after Neupert's death, police obtained search warrants based on the sworn testimonies of two black men, who claimed to have seen James Billy, Jr. and Reginald Miles near the site of the murder on the night of the shooting. In simultaneous pre-dawn raids they killed James Billy, Jr., Reginald Miles and his wife Sherry Singleton, whose child was present during the shooting. Another black man, Raymond Ferdinand, was also killed by police on a separate occasion, while being questioned on the street about Neupert's murder. In each case, police stated that those shot had weapons and were using them against police officers and that they acted in self-defense.

Others believed differently however. Sheila Pierce, Raymond Ferdinand's girlfriend, insisted that police had planted a knife on Ferdinand and that he was unarmed and innocent. James Billy's widow, who was led from the house by police, claimed that her husband had no gun, and that when she examined his body at the morgue she saw that he had been shot in the back of the head; she had left the house as the police forced him to stand spread-eagled against the wall. Gwen Hills, a next door neighbor of Reginald Miles and Sherry Singleton, was awakened by the commotion of the raid, saw the dead wagon (the vehicle used to transport dead bodies) parked in front, and heard Sherry screaming, "Please don't shoot me." The day after her death, Sherry Singleton's family contacted two attorneys, Mary Howell and Pam Bayer, who in turn contacted their friend Janet Densmore with the request that she accompany them immediately to the scenes of the killings and record on videotape whatever evidence they might find.

So began Densmore's involvement. "When I



An image from a montage in Janet Densmore's *THE ALGIERS INCIDENTS*. "Fading in and out of each other, shimmering, the images themselves seem lightning-struck, a compressed poetic analogue of Densmore's own feelings about the Algiers case."

started the recordings, I had no opinion or perspective about the Algiers killings. One cassette led imperatively to another." What prompted her to continue to tape was an overwhelming perception of "the visible signs of wrongdoing...a degree of carnage far in excess of that necessary to stop even 'armed suspects'." Densmore's tapes, some of which have been used as grand jury evidence in three grand juries convened to investigate the Algiers Incidents, build a case that challenges the official position taken by the city government, the police, and according to Densmore, the media: "The Mayor of New Orleans was informed about the acts of police brutality within two weeks of the shootings and held a meeting with other black leaders to suppress the public outcry...The local newspaper is still running full-page ads for the Patrolmen's Association to raise money for the defense fund. The local news refused my footage when I initially offered it for free, choosing instead to film the TV screen at our press conference and run a reporter's voice-over rather than let the public hear the actual accounts by witnesses. The local underground paper, the only publication to print continuous coverage, soon went out of business. Finally, after the "60 Minutes" report (a story on Algiers) local TV stations began to court me for the use of the footage, but none would agree to run sync audio, and in fact, the news director of the CBS affiliate flatly stated that 'there is no new evidence to be presented in this case' when I offered him the statement by the mystery

witness indicating that two white men had actually killed the policeman Gregory Neupert."

The mystery witness to whom Densmore refers came forward after two of the grand juries had met with the news that he had seen the events of November 8th, but had remained silent fearing for his own safety. What he recounted was a meeting between Neupert and two white males, one a hippie-type with long blonde hair. The men, who pulled up in a car, seemed to be conducting some sort of drug deal with Neupert. The witness saw a bag pulled out and a substance being tasted and spit out, then overheard an argument about money. "No man, not enough money," someone said. Suddenly a gun was pulled, Neupert shot, and both men fled. Neupert's body was discovered moments later by a fellow officer, who claims to have been six blocks away, but others think he was much closer. A search for two white males, one easily recognizable for his long blond hair, began in the black neighborhood where the shooting had just occurred. (How the police knew to search for these suspects if there were no witnesses remains unclear to me.) But within hours the search had taken on a different focus. The two whites were forgotten and attention turned toward blacks. The explanation offered by residents of Algiers for this shift: "When a white cop dies in the streets,

ON THE COVER: The mystery witness in Janet Densmore's provocative videotape from New Orleans, *THE ALGIERS INCIDENTS*.



everybody knows who's going to pay."

While no one ever makes the flat out accusation that the reign of terror visited upon Algiers was a racist cover-up undertaken by the New Orleans Police Department to conceal its dealings in narcotics, such an implication runs just below the surface of Densmore's angry and immediate work. *The Algiers Incidents* is not an even-tempered tape. It speaks furiously in the voices of those whose stories have not been heard, who have been systematically ignored or excluded by the media. There's nothing polite or refrained in Densmore's footage of the bloody bathtub where Singleton was shot or the still photos of Billy at the morgue and Miles with pieces of flesh torn away by bullets. The images are shocking, even sensational, and demand attention in the same way that all images of atrocity demand attention. But they aren't neutralized as such materials might be in the tide of information called the nightly news. Instead, they are intensified, made more disturbing by their context, the interviews, testimonies, and linking impressionistic montages that constitute the text of *The Algiers Incidents*.

The tape opens with the longest of the montage segments, an apocalyptic passage of flames, redness, demonstrators bearing signs protesting police brutality, newspaper clippings and a prison building, an eclipse and lightning splitting the sky. Fading in and out of each other, shimmering, the images themselves seem lightning-struck, a compressed poetic analogue of Densmore's own feelings about the Algiers case. Accompanying them is music that has the quality of a Brazilian carnival melody transposed into a mournful song, with the vocal rendered in what sounds like a black patois. The evocative atmosphere of this opening is shattered by the first of three interviews. It features Sheila Pierce, friend of Raymond Ferdinand, who was shot before her eyes as they were on their way home to the Fischer housing projects in Algiers one evening. The camera set-up is simple: Pierce looks into the camera in a very tight close-up. The color of her skin is picked up by the color of the wall behind her, a golden brown. There is nothing going on but her face, the sharp line of her jaw, the defiance in her voice as she remembers telling the policeman who shot Ferdinand "You killed him for nothing." She says that the police officer, John Marie, told one of the other cops to get her out of there, and then said "I should have killed him. He pulled a knife on me." I said, "He didn't pull no knife. The knife was in the bag. I seen when you threw the bag to the ground. The knife fell out of the bag."

In the next interview, which begins with James Billy, Jr.'s three-year-old son holding a Polaroid photo of his father in front of his face, the shot is opened up to show Kim Landy, Billy's widow, seated on a couch holding her baby; her son, sitting next to her, fidgets, grins, and sticks his foot in his mouth while she talks in an almost matter-of-fact way about Billy's death. As she describes his initial questioning and beating, she reaches for the boy and pulls his foot away unceremoniously. Together, the young mother with one child at her breast and one seated beside her on the vaguely baroque sofa look like they should be posing for a family portrait destined to grace a living room wall or the top of a TV set, not remembering such terrible violence.

As if to offset Landy's composure, Densmore cuts to Gwen Hills, a plump, youngish black woman who seems on the verge of tears as she talks about the killing of Miles and Singleton. Again, as in the previous interviews, the camera is stationary, the background stark, and the presence of the speaker all important. What I remember most clearly about Hills is her grief and her air of disbelief as she speaks of the way the police handled Sherry Singleton's four-year-old son: "They didn't ask nothin' about the child. They just threw him out in the street."

Not all the interviews in the tape are as raw as

these. Ron Ridenhour, an investigative reporter, unveils his theory that drugs were behind Neupert's murder. Harry Tervalon, a former Assistant Director of Internal Affairs for the New Orleans Police Department, voices the opinion that outsiders can't ever get a fair and unbiased investigation from within the Police Department because there's an unwritten law: "You just don't rat." District Attorney Connick, gray-haired, blue-eyed, and slightly defensive, says that he is convinced that justice has been done, that all the evidence that could have been presented to the grand juries was indeed made known to them. His comments come as if in reply to an earlier assertion by one of the lawyers representing the families of those killed. "There is no justice," she states. "Not a single politician in this city or state had the moral fortitude and courage to say these killings were wrong."

Among the most controversial elements in the tape are the interviews with Robert Davis and Johnny Brownlee, two men whose initial testimony constituted the probable cause which enabled police to raid Billy's and Miles' homes. Both have now recanted and each contends that his testimony was extracted by the NOPD via beatings, torture and even death threats. There's plenty of evidence that police beatings and torture were routine in the Algiers Incidents investigations; in fact, three policemen were convicted of conspiracy and violation of civil rights for beatings of possible witnesses in the recent Dallas-based Algiers Incidents trial (which was moved from New Orleans to the more neutral Texas location). Still, Harry Tervalon's observation that "You just don't rat" applies as much to an embattled minority community like Algiers as it does to an institution like the police department. Whether or not Brownlee and Davis were forced to give untrue testimony, an argument could be made that they would have invariably denied their evidence. Such a suggestion is never raised in Densmore's tape. It doesn't fit into the picture she assembles from the puzzle pieces of stories, memories, testimonies, and in any case it's a point which is essentially unresolvable -- either you believe Brownlee and Davis or you don't. What is essential though is that without the evidence of these two, the police have nothing to even suggest that Billy and Miles were involved in the murder of Officer Gregory Neupert.

Central to *The Algiers Incidents* and to the trials both past and future is the enigmatic mystery witness. This shadowy character, who resolutely avoided interviews with three major television networks in New Orleans, materializes in Densmore's tape as a powerfully built black man, tangibly and strikingly photographed in medium close-up. Shot from behind, his head and white T-shirted shoulders filling the screen, he gestures

toward the site of the confrontation, then jogs to the spot to re-enact Neupert's death. The strong graphic composition of the close-up changes to a long-shot, which reveals his silhouetted figure first assuming the role of Neupert's attacker firing a gun, then the role of Neupert himself stiffening and falling to the ground. There's something strangely familiar about this performance, a short-hand quality which reminds one of countless westerns and gangster movies in which death by bullet is stylized and abstracted, not the brutal and messy business depicted in the earlier photos of Miles and Singleton.

As formal as many of Densmore's compositions are, the overall sense of *The Algiers Incidents* is rough, insistent, and full of conviction. Funded out of pocket and completed for \$2,000, the tape was shot on 1/4", 1/2", and 3/4" videotape and edited in Houston at SWAMP (South West Alternate Media Project) through its donation of editing facilities during off hours. Clearly it is the work of an artist who believes not only in her ability to unearth truth, but also in her power to affect change. Densmore says she is committed to "the notion that mass communications are not just the province of the networks and cable superstations." Her commitment to this position endures after what she sees as a lengthy period of suppression of her work. In New Orleans, *The Algiers Incidents* was not publicly shown until quite recently; she writes that the Contemporary Arts Center (which has since shown the tape) "refused it due to the controversy it invariably created." Even the "60 Minutes" program, which used material recorded by Densmore in its story, ran into trouble, provoking New Orleans Judge Duplantier to issue a ban on its national broadcast. Duplantier's ban was overturned by the Supreme Court, but he is currently in litigation, suing CBS for contempt of court.

Meanwhile, the criminal trials continue. The policemen who killed Billy, Miles and Singleton continue to work for the New Orleans Police Department, now in the Auto Theft Division. Civil suits will eventually follow the criminal ones currently in progress, but the legal process is slow indeed. Years from now a jury will probably look at Janet Densmore's footage and try to determine how it serves as a chronicle of fact, whether it is an untainted witness of truth. At that time it will be more concrete than memory, more real than a still photograph, but will remain the troublesome, ultimately subjective entity that we call documentary.

*The Algiers Incidents* is distributed by Janet Densmore, 4104 Constance Street, New Orleans, LA 70115 and the *Algiers Justice Fund*, c/o Howell & Bayer, 316 S. Dorgenois Street, New Orleans, LA 70119, (504) 822-4455.

## International Public Television Conference To Be Held In Charleston, S.C.

**INPUT** -- The International Public Television Screening Conference -- an annual forum for the exchange of program ideas among producers, programmers and others interested in the making of quality television to serve the public--will be held April 8-14, 1984 at the Francis Marion Hotel in Charleston, S.C.

Its purpose is to seek and open international channels of communication in order for creators of public service television programs throughout the world to come to understand each other's work and thereby develop relationships to improve their art and craft and their purpose. INPUT is a unique opportunity for working professionals to look beyond national borders and local horizons to find new perspectives, techniques and ideas. It is not a market, festival, or awards competition. It is, rather, an immersion in ideas of professional excellence directed towards the ideal of understanding the impact of television programs on the people of

all places.

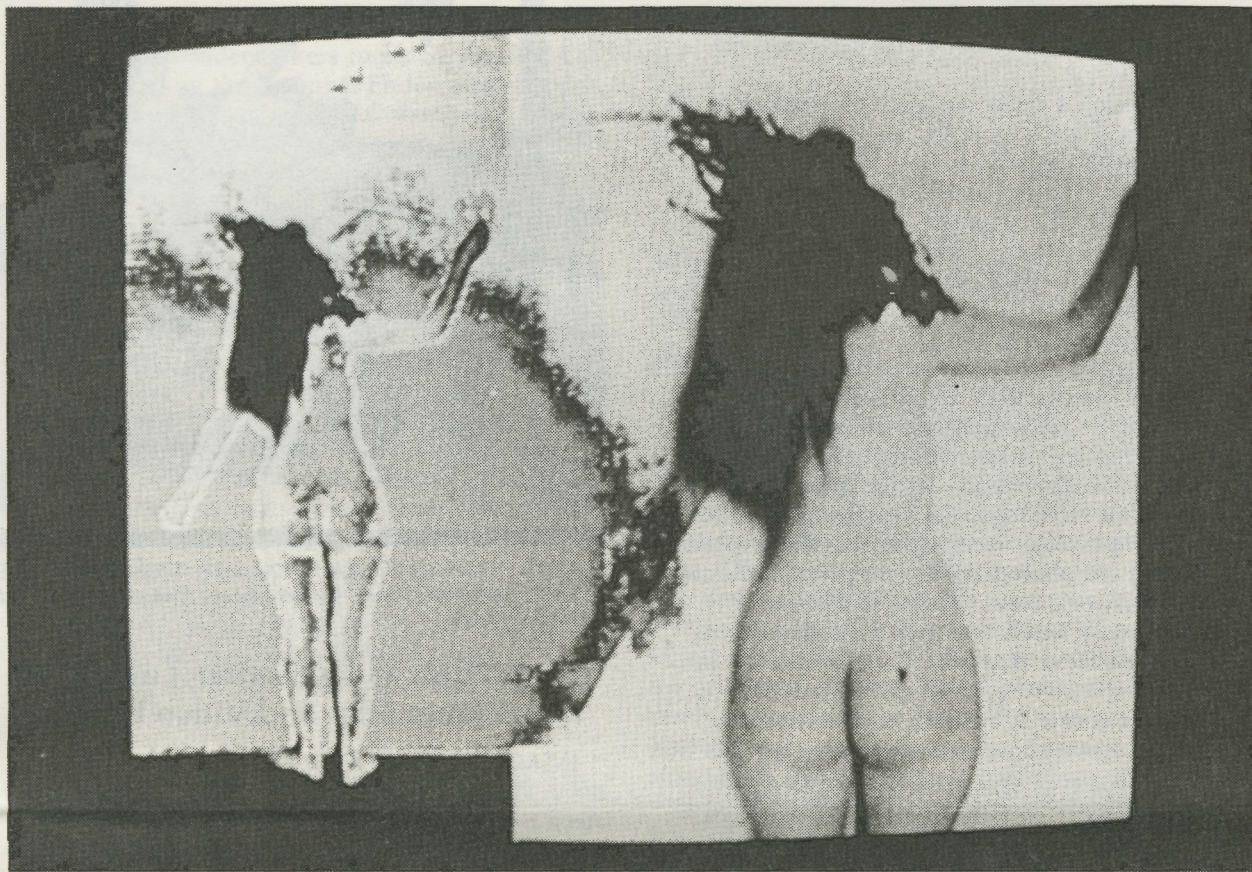
Participants from 20 to 30 countries will exchange views on the programs that they're currently making and distributing. Programs from 15 to 20 countries will be exhibited and discussed. The 300 participants will screen 70 hours of the most interesting and innovative television programs produced. Discussion and criticism of international programming will generate overviews of international trends.

In order to limit the conference primarily to professional broadcasters, formal accreditation is necessary. There is no charge for delegates. Although the programs screened and their producers are the focus of the conference, other television professionals and independents are welcome. For more information contact: Carolyn Holderman, South Carolina ETV Network, P.O. Drawer L, Columbia, S.C. 29250. 803-758-7552.



# Reviews

## The Processing Of E.J. Bellocq: New Orleans Photographer



"Russett has produced an experimental videotape that looks at Bellocq through his photographs as translated into video." (A still from E.J. BELLOCQ: PROCESSED by Robert Russett.)

W.A. Brown

*E.J. Bellocq: Processed.* Robert Russett. 1982. ¾" Video. Color. Sound. 21m. (The sound track includes excerpts from a composition by Michel Madore.)

E.J. Bellocq has steadily made his way into the public consciousness. Artists and photographers became aware of Bellocq's work with the publication of Lee Friedlander's "Storyville Portraits." Louis Malle's feature film, *Pretty Baby* has the dual distinction of popularizing Bellocq's life while making Brooke Shields into the marketing phenomena of the decade due to the film's portrayal of Shields as a child prostitute. *Pretty Baby* is a fairly standard variation of the tormented artist-benevolent hooker theme. The film's treatment of childhood sexuality was considered daring by popular standards at the time - today it is almost a prime time television convention. *Pretty Baby* sanitized Bellocq's life, portraying him as a misunderstood but dashing romantic hero. The real Bellocq hardly fit that role - he was an unattractive, short man with a large, misshapen head. *Pretty Baby* looked like a perfume commercial with attractive actors and actresses frolicking in a soft focus pastel landscape. The turn-of-the-century New Orleans of E.J. Bellocq was quite different.

Robert Russett has taken a different approach to Bellocq's life. Russett has produced an experimental video-tape that looks at Bellocq through his photographs as translated into video. Russett has made extensive use of the vernacular of the video artist - feedback, colorized images, synthesized music, etc. Functionally, the work is collage with seemingly unrelated images, character generation, music and text blended into a complex mosaic.

Bellocq's images of self-posed prostitutes and a contemporary, live action shot of a woman brushing her hair are interpreted with luminous

colorations. Two texts are superimposed through selected passages of the tape: a colloquial narrative relating Bellocq's biographical information and a bilingual text of aesthetic statements by Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes. — Editor's Note.

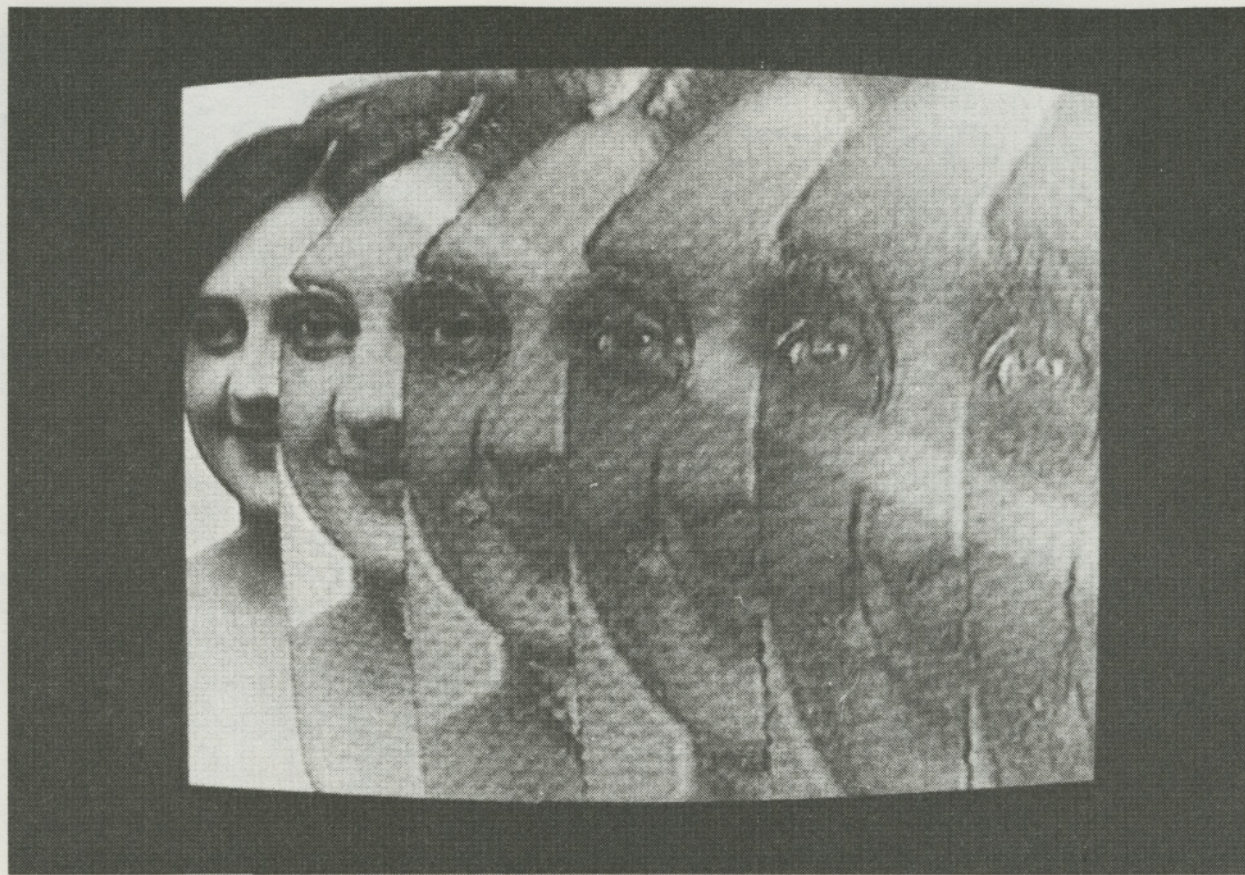
Bellocq's life is the stuff of popular legend: the artist/loner whose only female companionship is

found among prostitutes - an American Toulouse-Lautrec. *E.J. Bellocq: Processed* works best when the narration deals with Bellocq in this context. Conversely, the program is least effective when it deals with philosophical questions about the nature of photography, particularly those questions raised by Susan Sontag, art criticism's reigning queen of specious logic.

Bellocq the photographer spent his creative energy photographing his prostitute friends. The resulting images are remarkable on several levels: their technical adroitness and straightforward design, as well as the cues they give the viewer about Bellocq's relationship with his subjects, particularly their absolute trust in his motives. As Russett correctly observes, Bellocq's photographs are not pornographic. Pornography originally referred to writings or pictures of prostitutes and their activities. Early examples were found on the walls of Roman brothels and functioned as a type of menu for the customer. Bellocq's photographs are closer to the classical nude paintings of the Nineteenth Century. Pornography has at its core, sexual arousal. Bellocq's photographs are more reverent and distant.

The idea of developing an experimental videotape around a set of historical photographs is, as far as I know, something that has not been attempted previously. *E.J. Bellocq: Processed* is a strange amalgam of narrative and informational conventions skewed with the introduction of video art techniques. The problem I have with the work comes from the general problem of translating the collage form into video. It has to do with questions of selective attention. A Schwitters or Rauschenberg collage is an object or surface existing in space. The viewer has immediate and random access to all parts of the work. Indeed, the act of viewing such a work, the order in which different parts are viewed and the context in which the work

(Continued on Page 7)



An image from E.J. BELLOCQ: PROCESSED, an ambitious first video work by Robert Russett.



## View From The Stoop In New Orleans

Davis Sloss

*View From the Stoop.* Karen Snyder. 1982. ¾" Videotape. Color. Sound. 28m.

"It's looking for the breeze and trying to find a cool spot."

"It's kind of an outdoor living room. It has no parameters. It's just a nice place to come and settle and talk to people."

Stoop-sitters, or step-sitters, if you will, realize that this traditional social activity is not as popular or satisfying a pastime as it once was in their New Orleans' neighborhoods. Yet a few still come out after supper to enjoy the cooler part of the day, conversing with their neighbors and other passers-by.

"It makes you feel like you're living!"

*View From The Stoop* is a half-hour portrait by New Orleans video producer Karen Snyder, in association with the New Orleans Council on Aging and the New Orleans Video Access Center. Completed in December, 1982, the piece has been aired on Louisiana Public Television and has won recognition at video festivals around the country. Karen received some of the liveliest responses when she presented it to a number of New Orleans neighborhood groups. "We would get a discussion going afterwards about the loss of traditions in the neighborhoods. The people were in fact anxious to talk about that. We'd talk about how in modern times people stay in and watch T.V. and how we are losing a lot of our neighborhood culture in that way."

The veteran sitters find the show they get on the street superior to television: "It's the natural curiosity," "Everybody likes people-watching." "Company, too, it's company." "You get feelings for your neighbors." "Right, you become acquainted sitting on a stoop."

Larry makes a ritual out of his evening sit-outs. He and his three dogs sit on their stoop and wait for the regulars. He has a pillow on hand for the pedestrian who finds his stoop a little hard as she stops to talk. Another of his regular visitors occasionally brings him peanuts on his way home from a neighborhood bar. The dogs sniff the breeze as Larry divides up his gift among the four of them. "Two for you. Two for me. Two for you."

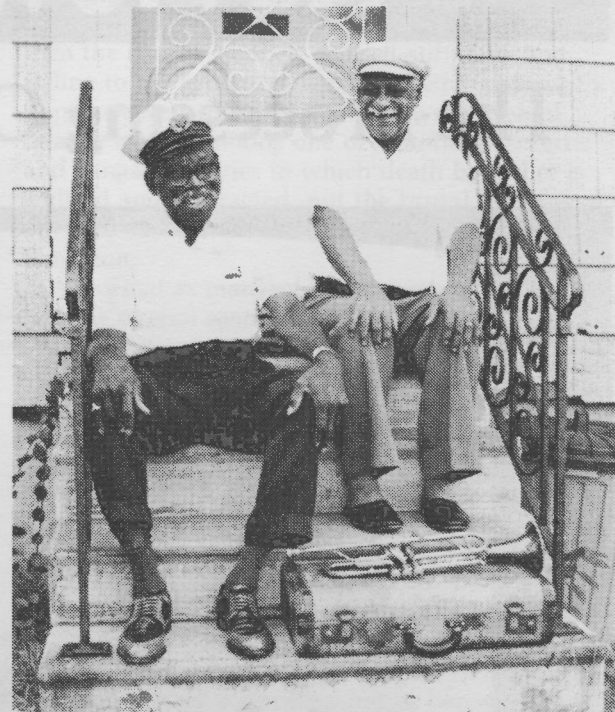
The "view" from the stoop is, of course, not a visual one. Karen refrains from shooting from the sitters' steps. Instead, she places the camera on the sidewalk at the foot of the stoop. As we listen to the sitters, we see them and their neighborhoods as a passerby might. We hear the sounds of the neighborhoods as we are treated to the sitters' views, reminiscences and concerns about stoop-sitting and the changing neighborhood character and life-styles.

After seeing a short sequence of a recent Mardi Gras in the French Quarter, we listen as Lydia and Dolores recall celebrating past Mardi Gras from their stoops. The day's food and drink would be brought out and consumed as they watched and enjoyed the maskers. "That was a lovely day," says Lydia. "I wish I could go back to some of them days. You try and tell the children what went on, and they just laugh at you."

The memories are vivid as others recall when the steps were for checkers, dominoes and gossip. Street vendors were more prevalent then, selling their waffles, ice cream, stuffed crabs and taffy to the sitters. Music wagons would come by and play a tune. "You have to throw money up there to keep them playing." Karen intercuts these recollections with old photographs from private sources and The Historic New Orleans Collection.

While many sitters feel their pastime is dying out, a few believe that with the new interest in neighborhood culture, a stoop-sitting rebirth is around the corner. One man is so enthusiastic about the activity that to make up for the fact that he does not own a real stoop, he uses a portable stoop. He needs assistance carrying his six-foot long wooden structure to the sidewalk, but he takes over from there, mixing drinks and enjoying the outside with his neighbors. "It's a nice way to get together with your neighbors at the end of the day. And that's really what stoop-sitting is all about, I guess."

*View From The Stoop* was funded by grants from the Louisiana Committee for the Humanities and the Alabama Filmmakers Co-op/NEA Regional Grant Program. The program is available on 1" or ¾" videotape through Karen Snyder, c/o NOVAC, 2010 Magazine, New Orleans, LA 70130.



A still from Karen Snyder's videotape, *VIEW FROM THE STOOP*, is of New Orleans friends Edward Richardson (left) and Al Gourrier (right).

### Image Film/Video Center To Present 8th Atlanta Film and Video Festival

IMAGE FILM/VIDEO CENTER will present the 8th ATLANTA FILM AND VIDEO FESTIVAL April 6-15, 1984 at the High Museum of Art and other locations in Atlanta, Georgia. Judges for this year's event are Dara Birnbaum, video artist; John Minkowsky, video/electronic arts curator at Media Study/Buffalo; James Benning, filmmaker; and Jennifer Lawson, Program Coordinator of the Program Fund of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. A fifth regional judge will participate in the selection of work for a "Southern Independents" showcase. The deadline for submission of works is Friday, February 17, 1984. Acceptable formats include Super-8 and 16mm film, ½" Betamax and VHS and ¾" video cassettes, and "mixed media" works that incorporate film and video formats.

This year's Festival will, in addition to its regular programs, feature two special showcases, one of animation in film and video and one of work by Southern media artists. Southern works will be presented on April 13. A performance by Mitchell Kriegman will be held on April 14.

More than \$5,000 in cash and other prizes will be awarded. For further information and application forms, contact IMAGE; 972 Peachtree St., Suite 213; Atlanta, GA 30309 or call 404-874-4756.

### Chinsegut Film/Video Conference To Be Held In April

The Seventh Annual Chinsegut Film/Video Conference will be held April 26, 27, and 28, 1984 at the Tides Motel and Bath Club, N. Redington Beach, Florida. The festival will present a full spectrum of film and video work (documentaries, features, and personal cinema). As always, there will be special emphasis on performances, personal cinema, and events. Last year's guests included Les Blank, Mitchell Kriegman, Dara Birnbaum, Lee Sokol, Greer Grant, Dan Curry, Peter Bundy, Tony Buba, Gayla Jamison, Stewart Lippe, Alyson Pou, Ted Lyman, and Mel Kiser. Deadline for submitting entries is February 28. Acceptable formats are Super-8 and 16mm film and ¾" video. For further information, contact Atlantic Productions, 1508 Park Circle, Tampa, FL 33610, at 813-932-5149.



New Orleans video artist Karen Snyder talks with neighborhood stoop-sitters Margie Bottazi (center) and Ethel Chaplain (right).



# Exhibition

## Film/Video Artists To Tour 1984 Southern Circuit

The 1984 Southern Circuit will tour eight independent film/videomakers to six Southeastern cities. Funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, the South Carolina Arts Commission, local sponsors, and the Japan Foundation, the schedule is shown below.

ISHMAEL REED, who has written six novels and four volumes of poetry has now entered new territory. He is writing and producing video in a collective atmosphere with other talented writers, actors, and technicians. From Reed's original idea, he and Steve Cannon have written a black soap opera, *Personal Problems*. According to Reed, it is more real-life than any of the current black television series that favor a white's perspective of contemporary black life in America. *Personal Problems* is a vibrant, humorous drama that has been enhanced by improvisational dialogue from a cast of actors whose roles have been broadened to encourage the witty and passionate dynamics among family and friends. *Personal Problems* is not made of sit-com slickness but rather the human-felt, real stuff of a culture that is making it in spite of all the daily obstacles.

JOHN HANSON'S first feature in collaboration with Rob Nilsson was *Northern Lights*, which won Best First Feature at the 1979 Cannes Film Festival. Now after three years of researching, and living on the iron range of northern Minnesota (Hanson's home state), he and Sandra Schulberg have produced *Wildrose*, a narrative with a documentary flavor whose roots are the land, its people and their history. The story focuses on June Lorch, a 30-year-old, recently-divorced woman who begins working in the mines and advances to production truck driver of a 140-ton vehicle. Lay-offs cause her to be transferred to an all-male crew that is resistant to her as a co-worker. A relationship with another worker complicates her professional life. The character of June Lorch was drawn from conversations with five women miners. The women were supportive of the authenticity of June's character.

TONY BUBA, a native of Braddock, PA is immortalizing his hometown and its people. His films are short documentaries that are personal vignettes starring the people he has grown up with. When German director Werner Herzog visited Pittsburgh and screened local independent films, he responded politely to what he was seeing. But after seeing one of Buba's films, he insisted on seeing them all. "Both men share an affinity for the vast resources and stranger-than-fiction truths hidden beneath the surface of real life. But while Herzog has traveled the world in search of odd events and even odder people, Buba makes all of his films in downtown Braddock. For the last 10 years, (Buba) has been churning out short documentaries on his neighbors, all of whom seem to know him and trust him im-

plicity." (Marylynn Uricchio of the *Pittsburgh Post-gazette*). *Sweet Sal* is a documentary of a street-wise Sal Carulli who has played to the Braddock streets all of his life. *Betty's Corner Cafe* is a portrait of the woman who ran a neighborhood bar in Braddock for 40 years. *Mill Hunk Herald* is a film "dedicated to the spirit of Lech Walesa." (T.B.) *Washing Walls With Mrs. G.* is a tribute to Tony's Italian grandmother. Buba's presence are his legs on a ladder as he washes her kitchen walls. Mrs. G. supervises Tony as she reminisces about her early days in Braddock.

DAN CURRY is a filmmaker and instructor of film. His films are laced with subtle humor, controlled elegance, and often playful visual surprise. Although the majority of his films are experimental, they are not coolly intellectual. Rather they engage the viewer on a pleasing aesthetic level. The option is to delve further into the structure and theories behind the selections made by Curry. He admits he is driven by an obsession with technical perfection; however, he is a believer in the occasional intervention of chance that plays devil's advocate to his controlled film structures. *Waiting* was shot in downtown Chicago on a rainy night. The city street with people walking and pausing is reflected through time lapse photography. The result is a gorgeous, luminous study of "a flowing sea of light and forms...(the transformation of) a typical 'found' space through temporal manipulation." (D.C.) *Saturday Morning* is a fixed camera, aerial-view of a woman brushing her dog. Curry alters images and sounds and coaxes the audience to reassess the filmmaking techniques. *Zones* is made of seven sequences that challenge the standard conventions of film images, sounds, and narrative.

JUDY IRVING, along with Chris Beaver, Ruth Landy and Judith Lit are the Independent Documentary Group, producers of a feature film on the nuclear issue. *Dark Circle* has won the Grand Prize at the 1983 U.S. Film & Video Festival, a Blue Ribbon at the 1983 American Film Festival, and a nomination for an Academy Award in 1983. At the 1982 New York Film Festival it was enthusiastically received with the only standing ovation at the festival. Ms. Irving, as co-director, writer and producer of *Dark Circle*, also narrates the film. Her personal point of view is indicative of the film's tone that weaves archival footage with personal presence. Irving was born the year following the bombing of Hiroshima and her concern for the nuclear age, the people affected by it and the need for education about it, was the impetus for the film. *Dark Circle* is a carefully composed film that balances the facts of the nuclear age with personal testaments of its effects. It is set apart from more traditional anti-nuclear films because it does not attack the individual pro-nuker. Ultimately its focus is on the "American cor-

porations that are top earners in the nuclear industry."

LISZE BECHTOLD'S animated films have won awards at The Montreal International 16mm Film Festival, the Baltimore Film Festival, Sinking Creek Film Celebration, and the Big Muddy Film Festival. Her dance series includes *La Danseuse*, *Dance-bridge*, and *Two Stars*. The films begin with line drawings of female and male dancers whose movements are fluidly transformed against syncopated rhythms into refined Cubist designs. A recent film, *Moon Breath Beat*, is described by the filmmaker as "the friendship of a woman and her cats disrupted by their natural attraction to birds and the whims of the moon." *My Film, My Film, My Film*, produced in 1983, is a cooperative testament to the process of independent animation shared by three animators: Lesley Keen in Scotland, Candy Kugel in New York, and Lisze Bechtold in California. A film in progress is *The Rooftop Sailors*. Funded by the American Film Institute, the adventure stars a club of flying cats whose realm of thoughts, dreams and memories exclude dogs and mice.

BILL VIOLA is an innovator of video art. In 1981 he was artist-in-residence at the Sony Corporation in Japan, and also studied with a Zen priest/painter during his year-and-a-half stay. His reverence for both electronic technology and the power and inspiration of the image has produced a remarkable videography. J. Hoberman of the *VILLAGE VOICE* lauds Viola: "No video artist has shown greater sensitivity to the qualities of electronically recorded light and movement..." He describes scenes from Viola's *Hatsu Yume*... "an exquisite nocturne shot aboard a fishing trawler. Glistening pink-orange squid writhe on deck in extreme close-up, a sailor flicks his cigarette into the ocean in molasses slow-motion, the lighting is like something out of Fellini's *Amarcord*. Evocative as this is, the sequence is only a prelude to what follows. Viola takes his camera into downtown Tokyo, shooting at night from a moving car. The surrounding traffic is transformed via slow-motion into a blur of forcelines, its lights burning visceral after-images onto the screen. Taping through the windshield during a heavy rain, Viola produces a fantastic deluge of neon blue, iridescent green, and electric mango. After a sumptuous few minutes, this surge of churning refraction resolves itself (by an invisible cut) into macro close-ups of a pool filled with gold and red carp."

Japanese animator KIHACHIRO KAWAMOTO made Japan's first puppet animation in 1953 as a series of television commercials for Asahi Beer. Early puppet animations included *Little Black Sambo* and Japanese fairy tales *The Old Man and The Demons* and *The Dancing Tea Kettle*. In 1963-4 Kawamoto studied in Czechoslovakia under master puppet animator Jiri Trnka. *Dojoji Temple*, by Kawamoto, won the prize for excellence at the Japan Art Festival, the Emile Reynaux Prize and Prix du Publique at Annecy International Animated Film Festival, and a Special Award at the Melbourne Film Festival. Kawamoto constructed the puppets, scripted, directed, and produced the film that is the story of the love of a young widow for a young monk who lodges for an evening in her home enroute to a shrine. In her pursuit of him, she is transformed into a white serpent, symbol of jealousy and passion. Kawamoto's appearance on the Southern Circuit is co-sponsored by the Japan Foundation.

	Memphis, TN Southwestern at Memphis	Columbia, SC USC	Whitesburg, KY Appalshop	Raleigh, NC NC State U.	Atlanta, GA Georgia State U.	New Orleans, LA Contemporary Arts Center
Ishmael Reed	March 29	March 30	March 31	April 2	April 3	April 4
John Hanson	April 5	April 6	April 7	April 9	April 10	April 11
Tony Buba	May 3	May 4	April 28	April 30	May 1	May 2
Judy Irving	Sept. 13	Sept. 14	Sept. 15	Sept. 17	Sept. 18	Sept. 19
Dan Curry	Sept. 27	Sept. 28	Sept. 29	Oct. 1	Oct. 2	Oct. 3
Lisze Bechtold	Oct. 11	Oct. 12	Oct. 13	Oct. 15	Oct. 16	Oct. 17
Bill Viola	Oct. 25	Oct. 26	Oct. 27	Oct. 29	Oct. 30	Oct. 31
Kihachiro Kawamoto	Nov. 8	Nov. 9	Nov. 10	Nov. 12	Nov. 13	Nov. 14



# Comments

## Works In Progress

David Sloss

**Lee Aber (Ruston, LA)** Acadiana's (Southern Louisiana) appetite for turtle meat is a threat that challenges the survival of the Alligator Snapping Turtle as a species. But that is only part of the problem. Lee's video documentary focuses on the effects that this animal's diminishing numbers are having on local, traditional and recently emerging commercial trapping techniques. "The local people who have traditionally caught the turtle to feed their families and themselves aren't a problem to the turtle," says Lee. "It's basically these commercial turtle trappers who go out and catch 1,000 pounds a day." With the disappearance of the turtles from Acadiana, people who had been accustomed to trapping their own are now forced to buy their meat from a market. Whether the turtles are caught in Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, or Florida, they all end up in Louisiana. At this point, 70-90% of the turtles sold in Louisiana come from out-of-state. Unlike other species of turtles, the Alligator Snapper must survive 14 to 20 years before it can reproduce. "If you take all the big ones, which they're (commercial opportunists) catching," explains Lee, "it would take twenty years until there's another large supply of them. But with habitat degradation, the quality of the water going down, the channelization of the water, and the encroachment of salt water into Louisiana, the habitat of the turtles is also disappearing. This is as much a problem for the turtles as being trapped out. We're not anti-harvest at all. We'd like to see this tradition continue. If someone can go out and catch their own meal and feed their own family, that's the way it should be. But you must compare this with the existence of a very viable animal within an environment and decide which is better." Lee plans to complete the tape around the first of the year, show it on the Louisiana Public Broadcasting System, and present it to any other state that has the turtle.

**Victor Nunez (Tallahassee, FL)** Principal photography was completed in September for Victor Nunez's feature film, *A Flash of Green*. Victor wrote the adaptation of the John D. McDonald novel, directed, and ran camera for the nine weeks of shooting in Sarasota, Florida. The film is a period story, set in 1961, about the experiences of a newspaper reporter caught in the middle of a bay development deal. It is not a typical McDonald story in that it is not a mystery. "It's sort of folk melodrama," explains Nunez. "Except to the greater extent that (the dredging and filling of a bay) is an image of Man's destruction of his environment, the setting only serves as the environment that the characters have to work in." Shot in Super 16mm, the project will also be edited in Super 16mm on a Moviola Flatbed that Victor modified for the format. The film is a co-production with the PBS American Playhouse Series. "This is a new policy from their point of view, where they realize that to have these films out there can only enhance the eventual showing on Playhouse...I think it is a very exciting option that has opened up; how long it will be here, I don't know." This new approach for the PBS series began recently and four other projects, in addition to *A Flash of Green*, have also been partially funded this way. "Playhouse puts up money in exchange for providing a theatrical window and a certain amount of flexibility as to the air date. Should the film get a theatrical credibility or life of



**HANSEL AND GRETEL: AN APPALACHIAN VERSION** produced by Davenport Films is part of a series **FROM THE BROTHERS GRIMM: AMERICAN VERSIONS OF TRADITIONAL FOLKTALES**.

its own, there will be time to exploit that before it goes on the air."

**Tom Davenport (Delaplane, VA)** Tom is finishing two film projects. One is a television series for PBS entitled, *From the Brothers Grimm*. This seven-part series of American adaptations of a traditional folk tales is set around Delaplane. Two years in the making, the 20-minute shows will be aired on instructional television beginning in January. "It has been a very fun series because it's like producing little feature films," says Tom. "The hard part was that we had a relatively small budget: \$50,000 per twenty-minute segment. We had union actors, some union staff, and each film had to be costumed and set differently." The other film, also in progress, entitled *The Singing Stream*, began as a portrait of The Golden Echoes, a rural black gospel singing group from Creedmoor, North Carolina. Three of the group's members (including the leader) are from the Landis family. For four generations the family has produced prominent local singers. Tom soon realized that if he shifted the focus of the film to the Landis family, he could include this lively gospel tradition and much more. The film will center on five of the family members: Bertha, 85, the oldest living member of the family, and four of her eleven children and ninety grandchildren. "On one level the film is a historical overview of black gospel music, because this family represents numerous gospel styles. On the other side of it, it is really a success story of a family that rose from tenant farming to a place of real leadership in their community. They used music as the thing that held them together and gave them strength."

**Kathleen Dowdey (Atlanta, GA)** *When Will You Marry* is the working title of the narrative feature that went into production in September, in Atlanta. Kathleen wrote and directed the film which deals dramatically with the subject of domestic violence. The subject, which in the past has been dealt with clinically in the documentary genre, will be handled differently by Kathleen. Executive producer Jed Dannenbaum explains, "When others have dealt with the issue they tend to

take in a lot of stereotypes. It has often been portrayed as a problem of lower income groups. It has been something that is on the fringe of human behavior in the sense that men are generally portrayed as sadistic psychopathic types and the women as pathetic victims." The unique approach that this film will take centers on the fact that the couple portrayed is upper-middle class and, more importantly, they have a loving, warm relationship to begin with. The husband, although at fault, is not portrayed as a villainous ogre. The wife, well-educated and childless does not have any of the typical, concrete reasons for not leaving. The story really emphasizes that even a strong, intelligent woman can get trapped in the cycle of being beaten. The emphasis is on making this relationship and situation seem familiar to people. "Even for all of the people who have never had any violence in a personal relationship," says Jed, "there are aspects in a violent relationship that anyone can understand and relate to... None of this is heavy-handed or didactic in the story. The emphasis is on it being a very powerful and moving drama." The filmmakers hope to have a print by February and plan to have it in distribution this summer.

**Joan Strommer (Richmond, VA)** Joan is breaking from the content common to her last three films. "The trilogy (*Twins*, *Mother*, and *Father*) brought me closer to universal concepts," says Joan. "Now that I've gotten this far, I'm interested in moving away from the personal relationship concept to a broader concept." Her new film, *Utterances*, will be an attempt to do that. Sound has been so very important in Joan's films and with *Utterances* she plans to address it straight on. The utterances will not be words but emerging sounds, rising forth not only from living things (a baby's tiny sounds as he struggles toward the white light from a window at Cape Hatteras or the smothering sounds of seagulls on a Virginia beach), but also from environmental sources (a waterfall). "I shot some footage of the whales at the Minnesota Zoo. They were making sounds that were attempts to externalize themselves, to get beyond their shells or their containers. This emotion (of non-vocal sounds) is the only way you can get yourself out of yourself. Not by vision; that's just opening a little shutter. But making a sound is throwing yourself out into space. A word narrows it, but a sound makes it very large." Joan plans to complete her film in a year-and-a-half.

### Film/Video Artists Solicited For Filmmakers-In-Education Program

The South Carolina Arts Commission is soliciting film/videomakers to add to a roster of artists available for two- to six-week residencies in its Filmmakers-in-Education program. To be considered for such employment, please submit a resume, copies of Super-8 silent or magnetic sound, 16mm silent or optical sound, or 3/4" color or black and white videotapes with production dates. For return of film or tape, send a stamped, self-addressed mailer along with materials. Films/tapes will be reviewed and returned to artists within 6-8 weeks of receipt. Send materials to: Personnel Office, South Carolina Arts Commission, 1800 Gervais Street, Columbia, S.C. 29201.



# Resources

## 1984 Southeast Media Fellowship Program

Appalshop, Inc. a regional Media Arts Center located in Whitesburg, Kentucky, announces the 1984 Southeast Media Fellowship Program, designed to aid independent film and videomakers in the nine-state region of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. The program, which grants up to \$5,000 for new works and works in progress, is funded by the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional support is being provided by the state arts agencies of Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia, which will match grants given to artists

within each respective state when awarded a regional fellowship. A total of \$40,000 will be available through this program. In addition, the Tennessee Arts Council will award a media fellowship in the range of \$4,000 to at least one Tennessee artist chosen by the regional panel.

Four equipment access grants will also be awarded through the program for the use of film and video production and editing equipment, provided by the South Carolina Arts Commission Media Arts Center. These grants are for: 1) VIDEO PRODUCTION--2 weeks use of JVC KY-2700

camera/recorder system; 2) FILM PRODUCTION--2 weeks use of Arri BL or Eclair ACL camera and Nagra; 3) VIDEO EDITING--2 weeks use of Sony 5850 editing studio; 4) FILM EDITING--4 weeks use of Steenbeck/Transfer editing studio.

All grant selections will be made by a three-member independent panel chosen for their knowledge of the media arts and understanding of film and video production techniques. Application forms and additional information about the program are available from:

Mimi Pickering 606/633-0108  
SOUTHEAST MEDIA FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM  
APPALSHOP, INC.  
306 Madison St.  
Whitesburg, KY 41858

### Calendar

- Feb. 1, 1984 Deadline for submission of application and support materials.
- Feb. 15, 1984 Deadline for arrival of sample work under separate cover.
- Mar. 15, 1984 Grant awards announced and NEA funds made available.
- Mar. 15, 1986 Deadline for completion of projects funded.



Independent filmmaker Gary Zeigler relishes a moment at the South Carolina Media Arts Center Video Editing Studio. (photo by David Sloss)

## Such A Deal (You Wouldn't Believe)

Are you an independent Southeastern video artist wandering the streets with your arms full of your unedited video tapes? Are your funds limited because you are working on a personally conceived project and do not have the big bucks that a corporate or commercial project would give you? The Media Arts Center at the South Carolina Arts Commission understands. Now, let me ask you a few more questions. What rental would you expect to pay for 24-hour access to a Sony VO 5800, VO 5850 and RM 440 3/4" video editing system? Wait, there's more. The package also comes with two Videotek RM-12 color monitors (one with blue gun, underscan, and cross-pulse features), and a Tascam Model 30 8-channel sound mixer with amplifier and speakers. \$200 per day, you say? Don't answer yet. For you folks from out of town, we here at the Media Arts Center will throw in as a bonus at no extra charge sleeping, kitchen and shower facilities. Are you ready for a shock? This package is yours for the unbelievable price of only \$50 PER DAY. Call now. Our operators are on

duty Monday through Friday 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. (EST). Dial 803-758-7942 for more information. Tell 'em David Sloss sent you.

### Screenwriting Workshop

The South Carolina Arts Commission Media Arts Center will present an intensive two-day workshop on writing and marketing screenplays, January 28-29, 1984, in Columbia, S.C., featuring Michael Hauge, a Hollywood-based story editor and independent producer. Participants will acquire tools and the knowledge to develop, write, evaluate, and sell a screenplay for a feature film, movie-for-television, series episode, or independent film which meets industry format and standards. Topics will include agents, guilds, copyrights, development deals, story selection, character development, plot structure, and dialogue.

A registration fee of \$50 will be charged for the workshop. Please contact the Media Arts Center at 803/758-7942 for additional details.

## Russett's E.J. Bellocq—

(Continued from Page 3)

exists help form the meaning. Film and video, on the other hand, force the viewer's attention with a serial presentation of the sound and images. Every viewer sees every frame in the same progression, at least in a normal viewing situation. With the traditional media you have the option of perceiving either details or the whole work. Film and video present a constant stream of detail. Collage works, presented in this context, lose much of their inherent richness. *E.J. Bellocq: Processed* left me with a sense of being overloaded with sounds and images. I found myself unable to form a Gestalt with all the different types of input.

Russett is to be commended for a very ambitious effort with his first video work. His choice of subject kept seducing my curiosity — I still want to know what happened to Bellocq between the time he was taking his Storyville Portraits and his sad demise as a senile street person aimlessly pointing his light meter without taking pictures. At the least, Russett's work forms an important precedent in terms of the video artist's use of historical photographs as subject matter. This, after all, is one of the things art is all about — suggesting new possibilities.

*E.J. Bellocq: Processed* is available from: Robert Russett, P.O. Box 41097, University of Southwestern Louisiana, Lafayette, LA, 70504, 318/231-6056.

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